

WIC Futures Study Group

Thursday, January 30, 2014
Wingate Hotel, Helena, MT

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Introduction

In response to financial, structural, and operational challenges within the Montana Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) nutritional program, the WIC Futures Study Group met to discuss the WIC service delivery system. The goal of the Study Group is to develop a statewide delivery system to provide effective, efficient, and high quality services to the greatest number of participants possible.

The meeting was held on Thursday, January 30, 2014. The weather prevented the physical presence of several participants. The following is a report of the meeting activities.

Participants included:

Mary Beth Frideres	MPCA	Lora Weir*	Teton County HD
Joan Bowsher	DPHHS/WIC	Linda Best	Deer Lodge/Beaverhead County WIC
Mark Walker	DPHHS/WIC	Danielle Golie	Hill County
Leah Steinle	DPHHS/WIC	Shawn Hinz (o)*	Riverstone Health
Corrine Kyler	DPHHS/WIC	Jill Steeley (o)	Gallatin HD
Kate Girard	DPHHS/WIC	Joe Russell*	Flathead City/County HD
Carol Ballew	DPHHS Epidemiologist		
Lisa Schmidt	DPHHS/Tobacco and NAPA		
Bernadette Lahr	DPHHS/WIC		
Bill Hodges*	Big Horn County HD		

* = on the phone
(o) = Observer

The meeting was facilitated by Mary Beth Frideres of the Montana Primary Care Association.

Opening Comments

Opening comments were made by Joan Bowsher, DPHHS WIC Director. Joan thanked the participants for coming. After introductions, Mary Beth reviewed the agenda with the group.

Update on the WIC Program and Funding

Joan talked about the “October Shut Down,” referring to the period of time in 2013 when the WIC program and all Federal programs did not know how much money they would have in their 2014 budgets due to Congressional debate. State WIC staff met with federal program staff every day by phone and Montana WIC was down to a few days of food dollars. Fortunately, the WIC program is now operating on a full year Continuing Resolution and administrators expect similar funding as in previous years. Unfortunately, there will be a 3-5% cut. They won’t know the exact amount until August. The state WIC program will continue to request Operational Adjustments

(OA) funds and reallocation funds. The state has not been notified on the amount they will receive for Breast Feeding and Peer Counseling Program (BPCP) and Farmer's Market. Joan said the good news is that with the new budget, BPCP, MIS/EBT, and Infrastructure funds are not tied to caseload.

Joan talked about the Abbott issue. Montana is one of 23 states who belong to Western States Contracting Alliance (WSCA). WSCA bids out the contract for formula rebate. There was a change in the calorie content three of the approved formulas. There is no decision whether there will be a rebate on the three formulas that they currently rebate. Montana WIC will be transitioning out of the three formulas.

The new monitoring procedure will be evaluated by the WIC Futures Study Group at the May meeting.

The Lincoln County Commissioners decided not to continue the contract to provide WIC services. After a RFP process, the Community Health Center in Libby Montana, Northwest CHC, will take over the local WIC program February 1st.

Joan said the State program has changed the way benefits will be issued from rolling month, to month to month issuance. EBT is also set up to be month to month. That way, participants can be notified that it is the end of the month and they may have unused benefits.

The new Food List will be implemented on May 1, 2014. The new booklet will be out mid-summer.

Linda asked about the change in the monitoring system and Bernadette said there were more consequences if compliance issues are not corrected. Joan reminded the group that the state now looks at 10 specific areas in Management and 10 areas in Nutrition. Before the onsite visits, state staff look at a certain percent of files based on the number of participants.

QA/QI Project Update

Kate Girard and Mark Walker used a PowerPoint presentation (next to this document on website) to inform the group in the room and over WebEx about the WIC QA/QI Project. They have worked hard to make sure the data in M-SPIRIT can be used to report on the chosen metrics – breastfeeding, BMI, and smoking. Small agencies have more variation due to small numbers and it is difficult to draw conclusions for those small populations. The data is preliminary and has not been statistically analyzed yet but they are working with state epidemiologists to get that done. Different methods of reporting the data were discussed. Mark said that the state WIC program is close to having a simple reports website which will make it easier for local staff to have access to data which is applicable to individual sites (e.g. no show data and the number or eligible and number of participants, as well as the results of the Participation Survey). Shawn Hinz talked about Riverstone's effort to change their systems to try to impact participant retention and thanked the state WIC staff for their assistance.

Farmer's Market and Vendor Management Evaluation

Using a PowerPoint document (attached), Leah Steinle and Joan reported on the Farm Direct and Vendor Management Evaluation. The results of the Vendor Management Evaluation were positive with only a few small findings. Leah described changes in the Peer Group program which helps to set the maximum allowable price for food items. A peer group for Supercenters was added, and buffers for Peer Group 1 and 3 were lowered.

The Farm Direct/Farmer's Market Management Evaluation was positive with only a few small findings. As a result of discussions with the reviewer, we found out our cashing rate was higher than the national average. The state WIC program had planned to perform a formal evaluation of the Farmer's Market Program to determine if it was effective in Montana but after the federal review, it was determined that we would reapply for the grant.

The yearend Farm Direct report was sent to local agencies and better represents the redemption rate of benefits issued by each local agency.

The state WIC program is changing the Local Agency Retail Coordinators (LARC) store visits from once per contract period to once every two years. The state staff will standardize the process and training and give support to the local agencies. Riverstone with 18 stores will have the biggest impact and will have to visit 9 stores per year. Linda said the stores should be visited more often but it adds to the cost of the local programs. Joan said the state WIC staff will try to put the cost of LARC duties into the funding formula.

Update on EBT

The contractor (JP Morgan) for the EBT project has notified the state that they are “exiting the EBT business” and will not be able to go forward with the project. Joan said the state intends to look for another contractor, but this is a blow to the plan and EBT will not be completed in 2014. Joan said it was a joint project with SNAP and TANF. No money has been paid to JP Morgan to date. There will be a meeting of administrators at DPHHS this week to discuss the problem. They will discuss if the state will stay with the plan to combine the efforts (WIC, SNAP, TANF), or if WIC should be split out. There are only 2 other contractors (Xerox and CDP) that can create cards with multiple systems.

Technology Demonstration

Kate and Leah showed the group how to use the www.WICHealth.org website for WIC education. They walked the group through the functions and offerings on the site so they could experience what the client experiences when visiting.

The benefits are:

- It is client centered – they choose when they want the education and what they want to learn about.
- Recommendations are based on best practice and are evidence based.
- Young people these days prefer to get information online.

The barriers are:

- Not having access to the Internet.
- Not using a smart phone.
- Staff doesn't know how to use it (need an outline).

Missoula, Flathead, and Cascade programs are using it consistently. Most participants do 1 1/2 – 2 lessons. Two new lessons have been added (Vitamin D and iron rich foods). Lessons are also available in Spanish.

Distance RD - WebEx www.WebEx.com can be used to provide education on Ipads or laptops with cameras. This can be utilized for face to face long distance dietitian services. Joe Russell asked what would drive clinics to use these services. Several people responded that the cost of RD services will be a factor.

WIC Participation Survey Results

Carol Ballew, epidemiologist for DPHHS, used a PowerPoint presentation to review the results of the recent WIC Participation survey. The goal of the survey is to discover how to increase WIC participation by 1,000 more clients across the state by discovering why they dropped out and then designing methods to keep them in the program.

Here are two things learned from the survey and how the state will respond:

1. People don't think they are eligible.
 - a. The state has changed the language in the certification letter to say that although the current certification has ended, the participant can be recertified for continued benefits.
 - b. The state is considering possible vendor interventions.

- c. The state is considering educating eligibility workers so that they know and tell people when they are eligible for WIC.
2. 80% of early leavers are children between one and five.
 - a. WIC staff should reinforce the ages of eligibility at certification and recertification.
 - b. Work with OPI to target those who are eligible for free or reduced lunch and preschool and daycare to get eligibility information out.

Ms. Ballew recommended, in addition to increasing outreach to eligible participants, that the WIC Futures Study Group consider adding Customer Service goals to the Quality Improvement plan.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the WIC Futures Study Group will be on May 13 and 14, 2014.

Agenda items for next meeting:

- Presentation on Riverstone's QI project
- Feedback on the changes in the monitoring process and evaluation of the process
- Mark's WIC Report Site demonstration
- Funding Formula discussion (add LARC costs column to formula spreadsheet)

Evaluation (+/△)

The group performed a short evaluation of the meeting. The following are the results of that process.

In regard to things that participants liked:

- Liked being able to call in on WebEx
- Liked the technology
- Glad to call in because of the weather
- The graphs and data are great info to give to County Commissioners
- Liked the people who participated in the meeting
- WebEx worked!
- Liked the results of the surveys – Kate and Leah – wonderful presentations!
- Pat WIC on the back – tied up loose ends – data is there, we need to move forward
- Thankful to be invited and to be a part of this. It is my first meeting.
- Liked the technology and survey discussion
- Loved the reports – get so much information from you guys!
- Liked seeing everyone again
- Excited about the technology - will help with distance work
- Great room and technology support this time
- Appreciate the time and effort people made so that we could participate and provide input into the program
- Like this hotel

In regard to things that could be improved:

- (from a person on the phone) Couldn't hear people in the back of the room.
- Couldn't hear people who weren't close to the microphone.
- Would rather to have been there.
- Couldn't hear due to background noise – probably missed some things
- The meeting is better when more people are here but understand the weather situation
- Consider not doing a winter meeting
- Move into more and different hot topics

- Hard to hear folks on the phone
- Move to center or get those little speakers
- Want handouts on all of the presentations
- Improve the weather
- Didn't want to put the meeting off again